

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**MOTHERS, BREASTFEED YOUR BABY AND SAVE
YOUR MILK MONEY**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The arrival of a new baby often sends parents searching for ways to cut household expenses. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) suggests that one way to save some money while improving the health of mother and baby is to breastfeed young children.

According to estimates by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, mothers who breastfeed can save at least \$700 on the cost for standard infant formula during the first year. This figure can increase significantly if the child needs a specialty formula. Savings can increase further due to the fact that breastfed babies generally incur fewer health care expenses and their parents lose less time from work to care for a sick child. At least \$3.6 billion could be saved nationwide in health care costs if more mothers breastfed their babies.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that mothers feed their infants only breast milk for the first six months of life and thereafter as long as it is mutually desired.

“Breast milk is the only food a baby needs for the first six months of life,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. “It has the right mix of vitamins, nutrients and antibodies to give babies a healthy start in life. Most of these are not duplicated in artificial infant formulas.”

Breastfeeding is an important factor in reducing infant and childhood diseases. Breastfeeding decreases the frequency and severity of diarrhea and gastrointestinal illnesses in newborns. It also lowers the risk of respiratory infections, allergic diseases, childhood asthma and leukemia.

Breastfeeding may also protect children against obesity later in life. Research suggests that breastfed babies are better able to regulate their feedings, which leads to better eating habits as they grow. Researchers also found a possible link between breast milk and a baby’s ability to store fat in healthy amounts.

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Mothers also benefit when they breastfeed their babies. They experience a decreased risk of ovarian and breast cancer and increased weight loss. Breastfeeding mothers also show less postpartum anxiety and depression than do formula-feeding mothers.

Breastfeeding in the United States has increased from 24 percent in the 1970s to 70 percent in 2002, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In Virginia, 67.2 percent of mothers who gave birth in a hospital in 2003 initiated breastfeeding, according to the Ross Mothers Survey.

For more information about breastfeeding visit www.vahealth.org/breastfeeding. Other sites include the La Leche League's Web site at www.lalecheleague.org and the American Dietetic Association's site at www.eatright.org.

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